



Larry Hogan, Governor · Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor · Dennis R. Schrader, Acting Secretary

**Behavioral Health Administration**

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April 1, 2021

Dear Behavioral Health Partners:

COVID-19 has challenged us in ways that we could not have imagined. Stress can bring out the best in us, however, more easily it strains underlying fault lines within ourselves, as well as our society. As we continue to confront and combat this public health emergency, we are also witnessing and responding to inequities and injustices within our society, as most recently highlighted by the targeted hostilities and hate-crimes the Asian American community is experiencing. Understandably, we may feel overwhelmed, anxious, exhausted, and apprehensive. The caring and support of the behavioral health provider community is needed, now more than ever.

To show our continued support to Asian Americans, I encourage you to share mental health resources that can help this community cope with race-based traumatic stress from race-based incidents of violence, which can lead to mental and emotional distress. Below are a few mental health supports you may wish to share:

- **[Asian American Psychological Association \(AAPA\)](#)**: an organization dedicated to helping mental health in Asian American communities through research, education, professional practice and policy founded in 1972. AAPA [created a list of resources during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) on everything from self-care to racism to caregiving and more.
- **[National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association](#)**: an organization that helps promote mental health and wellness for AAPI communities through resources, training, and awareness. It also has a [directory of service providers](#) across all 50 states.
- **[Asian Mental Health Collective](#)**: an organization that helps raise awareness about mental health care, contains a list of Asian therapists both in the U.S. and in Canada and provides [an organization directory](#).
- **[Inclusive Therapists](#)**: a social justice movement and directory founded to expand mental and behavioral health care to all communities, founded by licensed therapist Melody Li. People interested can search for a therapist by insurance, specialties, identity and more.
- **[Asians Do Therapy](#)**: an organization dedicated to reducing stigma and increasing access to therapy for AAPIs started by licensed therapist Yin J. Li. The site highlights how to navigate getting started finding a therapist, resources as well as sharing the stories of others in therapy.

## BH Partner Letter

April 1, 2021

The [podcast of the same name](#) highlights different aspects of therapy with guests ranging from thriving with Bipolar Disorder to healing from racism.

The **BHA Behavioral Health Equity Workgroup** has planned a 'Health Equity Open House' that is scheduled for April 22, 2021. This meeting will be an opportunity for the BHA workgroup to provide an overview of the equity efforts we are pursuing for our stakeholders and community partners. The workgroup continues to move forward with its commitment to build partnerships and advance the work of behavioral health equity. If you want to learn more about what we are doing and how you can collaborate, please contact [stephanie.slowly1@maryland.gov](mailto:stephanie.slowly1@maryland.gov).

Since last month's communication, I have attached some important updates on COVID-19 vaccines and ImmuNet, Maryland's Immunization Information System. Below are the links to some updated information:

- [Clinician letter COVID Vaccination 03232021 final.pdf](#)
- [COVID vaccine storage units reqs 03232021.pdf](#)
- [ImmuNet COVID-19 VFC and Non-VFC Registration Instructions.pdf](#)
- [ImmuNet COVID19-Vaccine-Registration-Guide 03222021.pdf](#)

If you have any questions, please contact the ImmuNet program at [mdh.mdimmunet@maryland.gov](mailto:mdh.mdimmunet@maryland.gov). Additionally, the State moved into **Phase 2A** and **2B** of its vaccine distribution plan, prioritizing all residents age 60 and over, as well as all Marylanders previously eligible in Phase 1, and includes Marylanders age 16 and older with underlying medical conditions that increase the risk for severe COVID-19 illness, and Marylanders with disabilities.

- **Marylanders eligible for vaccination (Phase 1, 2A, and 2B eligible populations)** are now able to **pre-register for vaccination at a mass vaccination site online at [covidvax.maryland.gov](https://covidvax.maryland.gov)** or by phone through the state's COVID-19 vaccination support center at **1-855-MD-GOVAX** (1-855-634-6829). **[Covidvax.maryland.gov](https://covidvax.maryland.gov)** can also be used to find hospitals, local health departments and pharmacies that offer vaccinations.

**Now is the time to register at Maryland's Immunization Information System (ImmuNet)** if you would like to be able to vaccinate the consumers of your services. **We encourage all OTPs, ACT, Mobile Treatment, Capitation and OMHCs that have the ability to give injections to register**, to ensure access to vaccines for our most at-risk behavioral health consumers. The attached ImmuNet Quick Reference Guide includes the following:

1. Eligibility screening
2. Provider registration/profile
3. Instructions on how to order vaccines
4. Instructions on reporting administered doses

Please note important reporting requirements to consider: ***All vaccinations administered in the State of Maryland are required to be reported to ImmuNet within 24 hours.*** Please refer to the [data reporting requirements](#) prior to registering to become a vaccination site to ensure you meet the requirements. Registration of new vaccination sites is managed by the Center for Immunization within the Prevention

## BH Partner Letter

April 1, 2021

and Health Promotion Administration. Please email [mdh.mdimmunet@maryland.gov](mailto:mdh.mdimmunet@maryland.gov) or 410-767-6794 for any technical assistance needs related to vaccination site registration.

Please stay informed and share vaccination information with your patients and community, which can be found at [covidLINK.maryland.gov](https://covidLINK.maryland.gov). State data and professional resources can continue to be found on [coronavirus.maryland.gov](https://coronavirus.maryland.gov).

The MDH websites also include information on **monoclonal antibody treatment (mAb)**. You can find information for the general public under [FAQs about monoclonal antibody treatment](#) on covidLINK (also be found on the [Newly Diagnosed webpage](#)). [Resources for professionals](#) are updated weekly on [coronavirus.maryland.gov](https://coronavirus.maryland.gov), including [this health care provider flyer](#) with information on referrals, treatment locations, and eligibility details. It is important that those at high risk of severe COVID-19 illness, be aware of this accessible treatment option. Eligibility includes everyone over the age of 65 who tests positive and younger groups with other medical conditions. To receive treatment individuals must be within 10 days of first experiencing symptoms. Monoclonal antibodies are recommended by the Infectious Diseases Society of America and the National Institutes of Health after a study found the treatment resulted in a 70% risk reduction of hospitalization or death. In Maryland, a total of 5,149 patients have received this treatment, resulting in approximately 242 avoided hospitalizations and 99 avoided deaths.

We hope that you are taking advantage of, and inviting others to participate in the **BHA/MedChi Behavioral Health Webinar Series: Helping the Helpers and Those They Serve**, which is held at 5 p.m. on the second and fourth Thursdays of each month. CMEs are available at no cost, as are Participant Certificates, which for other disciplines may qualify for CEUs or other continuing education credit, unfortunately these webinars are not approved for CEUs by the Maryland Board of Social Work Examiners. Participants should check with their certifying organizations to see how these would apply. Find information on these webinars and archived presentations [on our website](#). The next webinar is scheduled for April 8:

- Dealing with Microaggressions Experienced by Health Care Workers Related to COVID-19. Presenters: Crystal Han, MD and Amanda Sun, MD. Moderator: Angeline Pham, MD. [Register here](#).

The [Friday Provider Webinars](#) continue at 10:00 a.m., beginning again on April 9th, and are presented by our MDH Public Health partner, **Rebecca Perlmutter**. We encourage you to share these presentations with your colleagues and teams. These presentations can be found on [our webinar webpage](#) under Maryland Situation Update for BHA, where you can also register and view past webinars.

**Vaccine hesitancy**, wherever it exists, is a barrier to protecting ourselves and our community from COVID-19. On March 30, Rebecca Perlmutter was joined by Dr. David Rose of the Maryland Department of Human Services and delivered a presentation on vaccine hesitancy, including a focus on communities of color. We were fortunate to have peer specialists and others talk about their experiences receiving a vaccine. For those who joined this webinar, we hope that you found it beneficial in making your own decision to get vaccinated, and in responding to the concerns of your consumers, colleagues, and neighbors. You can find the webinar at this link: <https://youtu.be/we7OJ8j9bAA>. We will be providing a second vaccine webinar near the end of April that will be focused on strategies for providers to help

BH Partner Letter

April 1, 2021

them motivate their consumers to get vaccinated. Look for a Provider Alert and email notification for more details.

Through the Recovery Now Fund established by the Recovery for the Economy, Livelihoods, Industries, Entrepreneurs, and Families (RELIEF) Act, the Governor has provided funding for grants to providers serving people directed to treatment under code section 8-507 of the Health General Article, as well as for mobile crisis and stand-alone walk-in crisis services for the treatment of community mental health and substance use disorders. We are thankful for this support and we look forward to engaging relevant providers and distributing the funds as soon as possible.

The **BHA Crisis System Advisory Workgroup (CSAW): Transforming the Crisis Care System** is establishing three workgroups to target specific areas of development in the crisis system. These subcommittees include: Standardization and Best Practices, Data Dashboard and System Mapping, and Financial Stability and Sustainability. If you are interested in joining one of these subcommittees, please contact Sharon Lipford at [sharon.lipford@maryland.gov](mailto:sharon.lipford@maryland.gov). The subcommittees are set to begin meeting in May/June. To learn more about the work of the Crisis System Advisory Workgroup, please contact Stephanie Slowly: [stephanie.slowly@maryland.gov](mailto:stephanie.slowly@maryland.gov).

The **Multi-Agency Opioid Overdose Death Prevention Strategy Team** continues their efforts to closely monitor community overdoses and share strategies and new practices to respond to the opioid epidemic. I am happy to say that over the past few months, there have been no jurisdictional spikes, by the BHA's definition of a spike. During the March meeting, we learned about the strategy to saturate Maryland's communities with naloxone from the MDH Center of Harm Reduction Services. If you are interested in getting naloxone for your office or program to provide to consumers, please contact Erin Russell MPH, Chief, Center for Harm Reduction Services/Prevention and Health Promotion Administration, at [erin.russell@maryland.gov](mailto:erin.russell@maryland.gov).

We appreciate everyone who participated in the **Provider Financial Risk Survey**. We are evaluating the results of the survey, and hope that this will give us a better picture of the impact that COVID-19 has had on the financial stability of our provider community. We will share these results in a future communication.

We recognize that there continues to be significant challenges in resolving provider issues with the **Administrative Services Organization**. Working with Optum Maryland and Medicaid, BHA remains focused on obtaining resolutions to bring greater stability to our provider network. In the last month, Optum has activated both automated retro-eligibility review and checks for third-party liability, which have been two of the most significant obstacles to the smooth operation of the authorization and claims payment process. Older claims associated with these are now being reprocessed. The project to reconcile previously issued estimated payments with claims continues and has made significant progress on identifying problem areas. To further enhance this process, MDH will be engaging an accounting firm to evaluate and make recommendations on the reconciliation process.

At the request of the BHA, the University of Maryland Systems Evaluation Center (SEC) conducted a **third survey of PBHS providers and stakeholders in late January and early February of 2021. There were 986 survey responses.** Thank you for your record participation in this survey! A summary report of the results is being finalized and will be posted on the BHA website as soon as it is available.

BH Partner Letter

April 1, 2021

The **survey about issues impacting the Maryland Peer Recovery Specialist workforce** concludes on April 2. We appreciate everyone who participated in this important survey. The results will be used to develop strategies aimed at enhancing the professional development of Peer Recovery Specialists. We will share these results in a future communication.

As always, your support and commitment to building healthier communities continues to energize, encourage, and challenge me to lead our behavioral health community towards better outcomes. I am confident that with our ongoing collaborations and team effort, we will be successful in our goal to build resiliency and wellness.

The spiritual meaning of the month of April is *balanced equilibrium*; it is intrinsically linked to its symbols: the diamond is the birthstone of the fourth month, diamonds are thought to amplify thoughts and help you to be in control of your actions —to find balance. Astrologically speaking, psychic energy is in abundance during the month of April, which makes it ideal for meditation and reflection.

April is also National Humor Month and April 7 is World Health Day. Given all of this, this month may be a good time to raise our own consciousness for a healthier mind and body by engaging in personal meditation or other form of personal quietness and reflection. This can re-energize us as we do the work of building community wellness. We all have heard that laughter is the best medicine; so, let's give ourselves this gift by finding some humor as we cultivate hope, healing, and joy in our personal lives and throughout Maryland's communities.

I wish you all a happy spring and for those celebrating religious holidays this time of year — Happy Passover, Happy Easter, and Happy Ramadan!



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Attachment – Quick Reference Guide COVID-19 Vaccine Enrollment & Ordering

Attachment – Updated Clinician Letter

Attachment – ImmuNet Quick Reference Guide COVID-19 Vaccine Registration & Ordering